

Herbert Marcuse's Criticism of "Linguistic" Philosophy

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Though as to risings I can tell you this
It is on contradictions that they grow. *William Empson: Aubade.*

The work of Moore, Ryle, Austin and the later Wittgenstein has excited substantial hostility and criticism. Russell, for example, accused what he referred to as "the cult of common usage" of, *inter alia*, "insincerity," of advancing its views in "a tone of unctuous rectitude" and of "muddle-headedness", thereby initiating a tone of robust invective that has persisted ever since. Often this invective is founded upon the belief that the philosophers in question have detached philosophy from its traditional concern with the large issues of life and rendered it trivial. We find for example, in Anthony Quinton's recent book, *Thoughts and Thinkers*, the allegation that Wittgenstein, a man of "almost Tolstoyean moral sensibility", cut philosophy off from life by a "self mutilating effort of will".

Nowhere has this kind of criticism been more vigorously and robustly expressed than in Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*.¹ He writes:

The contemporary effort to reduce the scope and the truth of philosophy is tremendous, and the philosophers themselves proclaim the modesty and inefficacy of philosophy. It leaves the established reality untouched; it abhors transgression.

Austin's contemptuous treatment of the alternatives to the common usage of words and his defamation of what we "think up in our armchairs of an afternoon"; Wittgenstein's assurance that philosophy "leaves everything as it is" - such statements exhibit, to my mind, academic sado-masochism, self humiliation and self denunciation of the intellectual whose labour does not issue in scientific, technical or like achievements. (ODM 141).

¹Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, London, Abacus 1972.

The vigour of this denunciation results from what Marcuse believes to be a profound misunderstanding of the way in which philosophy should proceed and about the bearing of philosophy on practical action and especially on revolutionary action. To a philosopher such as Marcuse, committed to the belief that the philosopher is morally and spiritually obliged to engage in the criticism of society and its institutions, statements to the effect that "philosophy leaves everything as it is" will seem not merely absurd but morally wrong.

In what follows I shall argue that Marcuse's critique is blunted by various defects. It is blunted, for example, by a failure to distinguish carefully enough the possible targets of his attack and, in particular, by a tendency to lump all so-called "linguistic" philosophers together under the description "positivist". I would, like, however, to go deeper than criticisms of this kind.

One way of undermining Marcuse's criticisms of "linguistic" philosophy would be to show that the methods of philosophising that he attacks are implicit in his own writings. And indeed a casual inspection might suggest this to be so. What, for example, is the difference between saying, as Marcuse does, that there is an "inner connection between happiness and freedom" and that "conceptual analysis shows them to be identical"² and the programme of Ryle's *Concept of Mind* which asserts the necessity of establishing the "logical cross bearing of concepts".³ Both philosophers seem committed to "conceptual" enquiries.

One thing I shall try to do, therefore, is show that Marcuse is committed to, and must be committed to, the methods that he attacks. But I also wish to show that there is an awkward ambiguity in the attack that Marcuse, and I suspect in the attack that Quinton, launches on "linguistic" philosophy. We must be careful, as Marcuse is not, to distinguish between the claim that the methods of say, Wittgenstein, are no methods for a healthy philosophy and the less radical claim that these methods may be all right but need to be applied in areas other than those to which they are traditionally applied by "linguistic" philosophers. They need to be applied, in Marcuse's words, in "really controversial areas" (ODM 157). Now to mount a really radical attack Marcuse needs the earlier, stronger claim that the methods of the philosophers he attacks are defective.

²Herbert Marcuse, *Negations*, London, Penguin, 1968, p. 180.

³Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, New York, Barnes and Noble, p. 8.

And I shall argue that he cannot have this because those methods are those he himself uses. That will leave open, of course, the claim that these methods have not been deployed in the right places, and I may want to concede something to that. But in switching to this claim the radical force of Marcuse's attack is weakened.

I have to add two other preliminaries. First, I shall try to undermine Marcuse's criticisms by showing that the methods he criticises underlie his own work in *One-Dimensional Man*. I do not, however, intend to offer any justifications for those methods. It is, therefore, open to someone to find a quite different form of attack that would apply to the common methods of Marcuse and what he calls the "linguistic" philosophers. At the very end of this paper I shall indicate one form that this attack has taken.

Second, Marcuse attacks what he calls "linguistic" philosophy. Here there are two difficulties. One, to which I return later, arises from the blurring of targets that occurs when philosophers as different as Quine, Popper, Ayer, Wittgenstein, Ryle and Austin are grouped together as a single "positivistic" movement. So as not to compound confusion here I shall in large part discuss Marcuse's charges in the light of the work of Wittgenstein, one justification for this being that Wittgenstein clearly irritates Marcuse more than any other of the philosophers he criticises.

The other difficulty here is that the term "linguistic" philosophy is misleading and likely to suggest that Ryle, Austin and Wittgenstein were interested in *lexicographical* problems about the sounds and marks that are as a matter of fact used in this or that language to say something, rather than in problems about what it is to *say* something by the use of whatever marks this or that language happens to use. (As if there were no problem of knowledge for Aristotle because "knowledge" is an English and not a Greek word). The matter is a very complex one⁴ and misunderstandings here can generate unnecessary antagonisms. They can lead for example to the belief that linguistic philosophers are interested only in words. Marcuse sometimes falls for this, speaking for example of "linguistic" philosophy as involving the "separation of purely linguistic from conceptual analysis" (ODM 93), echoing in this Hume's worries about "philosophers who encroach upon the province of grammarians".⁵

⁴See V. Chappell, *Ordinary Language*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall.

⁵*Inquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals*, Appendix 4.

Against this we need to stress that Ryle, for example, emphasised that one aim of philosophy is *conceptual* analysis and that the use of words is studied only as a means to this end:

Hume's question was not about the word "cause" it was about the *use* of "cause". . . . Hume's question was not a question about a bit of the English language in any way in which it was not a question about a bit of the German language. . . . Putting the stress on the word "use" helps to bring out the important fact that the inquiry is an inquiry not into other features or properties of the word . . . but only into what is done with it . . . That is why it is so misleading to classify philosophical questions as linguistic questions — or as non-linguistic questions.⁶

Fortunately it is not necessary to delay overly long on this for I think that with occasional lapses Marcuse sees perfectly well that the "linguistic" philosopher is engaged in conceptual enquiries. Marcuse says, for example, that the chief concern of such a philosophy is "debunking transcendental *concepts*" (ODM 140, my stress). What is at stake is the way the task of conceptual enquiry should be conceived. With this I turn now to the detail of Marcuse's remarks.

I

I once heard the late Robert Kennedy quote with approval the saying "others have looked at this world and have said 'why'; I have thought of a better world and said, 'why not'". That in essence is the kernel of Marcuse's philosophy. We find there the belief that the motive power that drives the engines of social change is the perception by human beings of the discrepancy (Marcuse says "contradiction") between the world as it is and the world as it might be.

Marcuse refers to the global social structure as it is as "defective", "mutilating" and "deforming" and he calls it "irrational". What is the force of these remarks?

There is a use of the term "rational" that explains Marcuse's use of this term. If I am very thirsty and water is at hand then, in the absence of *special* explanations there is something illogical or irrational about my not drinking. In such cases there is an end or goal and to do what conduces to that end or goal will seem rational. What is not conducive to that given end or goal will seem irrational — given that end.

⁶Chappell, op. cit., p. 28.

When Marcuse calls the global social structure "irrational" he supposes there to be an end which humans as such have. He supposes that there is an end that human beings by their very nature seek and which if attained brings a person to full personhood. A society which makes it possible for people to attain this end is a rational one. One which frustrates the achievement of the proper end of human life is irrational. Since such an irrational social structure will prevent people from the fulfilment of themselves as persons, it will produce people who, judged against what we think a fulfilled person *should* be, will be mutilated, deformed and defective.

This account specifies an end, and moreover claims that having that end is part of what is *meant* by calling someone human. Much will therefore hang on what the end is and on the force of saying that it is part of the *essence* of a human being that she or he has that end.

What Marcuse believes the end to be is pretty clear. The end we seek is our happiness,⁷ where this seems to be interpreted as the "comprehensive gratification of needs and wants". (*Negations* 182). Our own global society obstructs the attainment of individual happiness and so is irrational and unnatural. Hence we stand in need of "the transformation of the material conditions of existence" (*ibid* 135).

It is not clear to me whether Marcuse believes that a rational society is actually attainable or whether he thinks the idea of such a society exists solely as a regulative idea of practical reason, a yardstick whereby to evaluate any existing society. The existence of what Fred Hirsch called "positional goods",⁸ goods, like a quiet walk on Helvellyn, which all might want but which none can have if all get, *might* suggest the practical unattainability of a rational society, in which case as Trotsky noted, tragedy may be endemic in the human condition. But even if the rational society is not attainable it provides the criterion by which social progress is determined.

For Marcuse perception of contradiction is the motive for change. The thought of a possible and better state of affairs stands opposed in eloquent accusation of one that is actual but worse.

Now there is in Marcuse a strongly expressed belief that the existing irrational social structure resists change. Sometimes this is put almost abstractly as if the here and now, like a Newtonian object

⁷See ODM *passim* and "Hedonism" in *Negations*.

⁸Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, London, RKP.

in motion, had to persist in its course until forcibly acted upon. And society does indeed have inertial force so that custom can, as Wordsworth put it, hang on us with a weight heavy as frost and deep almost as life. But more often, Marcuse seems to suggest that it is vested interests within the social structure that seek to preserve the *status quo*. Nowadays they do so, in particular, by seeking to prevent any sense of the contradiction between what defectively *is* and what, for the better might be, from ever arising. A massive co-ordination of the resources of modern psychology, sociology, philosophy, science and the media are bent to the task of trying to get us to believe that what *is*, our actual society, is *all right* and to shut out thoughts of different possible worlds, the thought of which might challenge existing social arrangements.

This explains the title *One-Dimensional Man*. For a contradiction is, so to speak, two-dimensional. There is that which contradicts and that which is contradicted. In Marcuse's account, for example, one dimension is the actual defective social reality, the other is the better possible world that stands in opposition to it. The "smoothing out" to which Marcuse continually refers entails the elimination of one of the poles of this duality by a massive effort to show that what is is all right. In the elimination of challenges to the status quo, life is reduced to one dimension, namely, the defective structure of the here and now:

Today's novel feature is the flattening out of the antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constituted another dimension of reality. (ODM 57).

I cannot here demonstrate the ingenuity and the fervour with which Marcuse states and attempts to demonstrate his case. Nor can I examine the difficult question whether Marcuse gloomily believed that the attempt to eliminate alternatives would succeed, leaving us with a one dimensional society, or somewhat more optimistically thought that in spite of all smoothing out the repressed irrationality of society must, like any neurosis, work to the surface and then break out in those forms of social unrest which might in turn prepare the way for a more rational society. Here I wish, rather, to look at the charge that what Marcuse calls "linguistic" philosophy has actively *collaborated* with the effort to convince us that the actual is all right and to conceal from us the irrationality of the social structure by eliminat-

ing as unmitigable an reference to anything other than the defective structure of the here and now. For this is alleged:

The authority of philosophy gives its blessing to the forces which make this universe. . . . Linguistic philosophy . . . identifies as its chief concern the debunking of transcendent concepts; it proclaims as its frame of reference the common usage of words, the variety of prevailing behaviour. With these characteristics it circumscribes its position in the philosophic tradition — namely at the opposite pole from these modes of thought which elaborated their concepts in tension with and even in contradiction to the prevailing universe of discourse and behaviour (ODM 142–3 and 139–140).

The result is that philosophy plays *its* part in closing down the dimensions of thought and so plays *its* part in closing down the consideration of alternatives to the status quo:

(Linguistic) . . . philosophy sets up a self sufficient world of its own, closed and well protected against the ingression of disturbing external factors. . . . it speaks the mutilated individual . . . whose behaviour is one dimensional and manipulated. . . . The positive cleaning of the mind brings the mind in line with the restricted experience.

I wish to deal with Marcuse's charge against linguistic philosophy in two parts. I wish first to examine and deny the claim that what he calls "linguistic" philosophy contributes to the flattening out of thought and so to a one-dimensional society by virtue of its *positivism* and *operationalist behaviourism*. Here I wish to show that Marcuse, by lumping together too many different philosophers, has failed to recognise allies when he has them. Then I want to look at the far deeper question of whether Wittgenstein's assertion that "philosophy leaves everything as it is" signals, as Marcuse asserts, a commitment to the uncritical acceptance and support of the status quo.

II

I begin then with the charges of positivism and operationalism and take first Marcuse's continual assertion that "linguistic" philosophy is positivistic.

One thing Marcuse means by this is that a physical-science model of thinking pervades modern thought. A quantitative attitude is taken to the world. Measurements are formulated into law-like statements that become instruments of prediction and control.

Further, positivism continually refers us to the *facts*, to what is the case, and refuses to allow sense to assertions that cannot be cashed out in terms of observable fact. Such assertions, to use a term that is indeed ubiquitous in a book like Ayer's *Language Truth and Logic* are "meaningless." Thus Marcuse writes:

The term "positivism" has encompassed (1) the validation of cognitive thought by experience of facts; (2) the orientation of cognitive thought to the physical sciences; (3) the belief that progress in knowledge depends on this orientation. . . . In it, the object world is being transformed into an instrumentality. Much of that which is still outside the instrumental world — unconquered blind nature — now appears within the reaches of scientific and technical progress. The metaphysical dimension, formerly a genuine field of rational thought, becomes irrational and unscientific. (ODM 140 and 141).

Linguistic philosophy is, in Marcuse's view, identical with this positivism and thus:

still directs its main effort against metaphysical notions. . . . It is motivated by a notion of exactness which is either that of formal logic or empirical description. Whether exactness is sought in the analytic purity of logic and mathematics, or in conformity with ordinary language — on both poles of contemporary philosophy is the same rejection or devaluation of those elements of thought and speech which transcend the accepted system of validation. (ODM 149)

Marcuse believes that the positivism of "linguistic" philosophy, with its emphasis on the factual here and now, has an important role to play in the suppression of criticism of the existing social structure. For he believes it to be a central feature of positivism that only factual statements can meaningfully *describe* the world as it is. But there is, too, in positivism an absolute distinction made between factual and evaluative assertions. And from this it follows that evaluative utterances cannot meaningfully characterise for us, *describe* to us, the *defective* nature of our social structure. Evaluations, on the positivist account are non-factual, which is to say "emotive", "vague", "inexact" and so forth. They must be confined to a "reservation" along with such things as poetry and religion. They may be allowed a function, but in that function they do not impinge upon the scientific task of describing the world:

Precisely the setting aside of a special reservation in which thought and language are permitted to be legitimately inexact, vague, and even contradictory is the most effective way of protecting the normal

universe of discourse from being seriously disturbed by unfitting ideas. Whatever truth may be contained in literature is "poetic" truth, whatever truth may be contained in critical idealism is "metaphysical truth" — its validity, if any, commits neither ordinary discourse and behaviour, nor the philosophy adjusted to them. This new form of the doctrine of the "double truth" sanctions a false consciousness by denying the relevance of the transcendent language to the universe of ordinary language, by proclaiming the total non-interference. (ODM 150).

I have no doubt that Marcuse has identified a pervasive aspect of modern thought. He is right to point to the flight from judgment to calculation, to the suspicion of activities which, since they involve value judgments, seem to resist the effort to quantify and to resist also the application of quantitative methods in their proof procedures. Hence, for example, the belief that artistic criticism is somehow suspect because the critic cannot *calculate* the merit of works of art and so *prove* his conclusion to any passing philistine. But Marcuse, through his grouping of Ayer, Popper, Quine, Austin, Ryle and Wittgenstein as a unified movement misses the fact that certain of what he calls the "linguistic" philosophers unite with him in radical criticism of positivism. Thus Marcuse, rightly it seems to me, claims that a postulate of positivism is that something called "empirical reality", determinable independently of the use of language, gives sense to the utterances made by the users of that language. But the truly radical criticism of this view comes not from Marcuse but from Wittgenstein and philosophers who have been influenced by him. Wittgenstein remarks that "Grammar tells us what kind of object a thing is (*Investigations* 373)," and the implication of this is that the distinction between what is real and what is not is not, as the positivist believes, determinable prior to any consideration of the use of language. In one of the classic passages in modern philosophy, Winch puts the matter thus:

Reality is not what gives language sense. What is real and what is unreal shows itself *in* the sense that language has. Further, both the distinction between the real and unreal and the concept of agreement with reality themselves belong to our language. . . . If then we wish to understand the significance of these concepts, we must examine the use they actually do have — *in* the language.⁹

⁹Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society", *The American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1964.

I do not here wish to argue that this view is right so much as to claim that if there is a radical criticism of the positivism that Marcuse wishes to attack, this is it. And Marcuse's lack of discrimination between various modern philosophers prevents him from exploiting this radical criticism.

Marcuse believes that what he calls positivism is related to what he calls operationalism in the philosophy of mind, and he believes that this operationalism is typical of what he calls "linguistic" philosophy.

Operationalism is the view found in Bridgman that the meaning of a statement, e.g. the statement that a thing has a certain length, is reducible to the operations by which we determine its truth. "Any concept (is) nothing more than a set of operations".¹⁰ The further charge that Marcuse brings against "linguistic" philosophers is that they "operationalise" mind and thus claim that minds are eliminable:

Contemporary analytic philosophy is out to exorcise such "myths" or metaphysical "ghosts" as Mind, Consciousness, Will, Soul, Self, by dissolving the intent of these concepts into statements on particular identifiable operations, performances, powers, dispositions, propensities, skills etc. . . . (thus) . . . analytic philosophy conceptualises the behaviour in the present technological organisation of reality (ODM 161 and 152).

Marcuse vigorously denies that talk about minds is eliminable in favour of talk of physicalist operations. For this reason the possession by a person of a mind is a fact that constantly obstructs the positivist effort to reduce everything to the physically observable, calculable and measurable. As such the existence of minds obstructs the attempt to reduce the world to the observable here and now. But Marcuse then maintains that "linguistic" philosophy in operationalising minds eliminates this obstruction and undermines one important area of resistance to the construction of a bland one-dimensional view of reality. In this way analytic philosophy assists the redefinition of thought and "helps to co-ordinate mental operations with those in the (defective, C.L.) social reality" (ODM 139).

No doubt when Ryle attacked the notion of the ghost behind the machine he wished to reduce the number of entities in the universe by one, as did Wittgenstein when he wrote that a mind, conceived as a

¹⁰W. Bridgman, *The Logic of Modern Physics*, New York, Macmillan 1928.

“something” open only to private inspection “drops out of consideration as irrelevant” (*Investigations*, 293). But in arguing this neither had wished to argue that *minds* are eliminable. A mind, Wittgenstein says, is not a something, “but it is not a nothing either” (*ibid.*, 304).

Since Marcuse’s fear is that “linguistic” philosophers wish to speed the day when the operationalist explanations of scientific positivists will be the only ones tolerated, it is worth noting here a passage from Ryle:

I have spoken of Mechanism as a bogey. The fear that theoretically minded persons have felt lest everything should turn out to be explicable by mechanical laws is a baseless fear. And it is baseless not because the contingency which they dread happens not to be impending, but because it makes no sense to speak of such a contingency. Physicists may one day have found the answers to all physical questions, but not all questions are physical questions (*op. cit.* 76).

Marcuse’s attack on positivism and operationalism may or may not be well founded. Here I claim only that he has no right to include some of those he calls “linguistic” philosophers in the attack and that by so including them he denies himself valuable allies.

III

So far I have tried to show that the kind of positivist-operationalist view that Marcuse wishes on “linguistic” philosophy is at odds with anything we find in that philosophy. But this approach does not touch on the real worry that lies behind Marcuse’s attitude to “linguistic” philosophy and to Wittgenstein in particular. What excites Marcuse’s animosity, and the subject to which he constantly returns are certain famous sayings that we find in the *Philosophical Investigations*. These include, “philosophy leaves everything as it is”, (ODM 141 and 149) and “Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language (ODM 145)”.

In the light of the account of Marcuse’s thought that I have given we can see why Marcuse might be hostile to this. For, according to him the society in which we live is an unjust, mutilating and deforming society, one in which millions of human beings are daily deprived of the happiness that is by their very nature their due. Over and against this society stand the possibilities of better social structures. The realisation that there are these better possibilities is the essential first step on the road to better things. And now, Marcuse believes,

here is a philosopher who tells us that everything is an *ought* as it is and that philosophy cannot interfere with what is actual.

Given Marcuse's beliefs and his understanding of the work of "linguistic" philosophy, his attack, right or wrong is at least comprehensible. What I wish now to show is that, with respect to Wittgenstein at least, there is no foundation in Marcuse's attack. Indeed, I shall argue, the Wittgensteinian remarks that excite Marcuse's scorn are implicit in Marcuse's own work.

I can begin the discussion by noting that in *One Dimensional Man* Marcuse does not in any obvious way *argue* for his positions. He does not offer us premisses from which his conclusions in some sense logically follow. Some, like Alasdair MacIntyre, find this suspicious.¹¹ I take a different attitude. For what we have in Marcuse's work is not unlike what we have when a critic presents to us a case for the excellence of a literary work of art, a situation in which, as Wordsworth neatly put it, there is no sense in the notion of "arguing the reader into approbation."¹² There is no provision of statements about the work from which other statements about its merit logically follow as a conclusion follows the premisses of a deductive argument. Rather there is an effort to direct the attention of the viewer or reader to features he is assumed to be capable of seeing, features, the seeing of which, amounts to seeing the merit features of the work. Leavis, for example does not argue deductively when telling us about a work. He directs attention to what is there to be seen and to the significance of what we have probably in some sense already seen. For example speaking of *The Mill on the Floss* he says:

We are most likely to make with conscious critical intent the comment that in George Eliot's presentment of Maggie there is an element of self-idealisation. The criticism sharpens itself when we say that with the self-idealisation there goes an element of self-pity. George Eliot's attitude to her own immaturity as represented by Maggie is the reverse of a mature one.¹³

In this passage the critic directly points out to us the fact that parts of a literary work of art are immature and that this is a defect of the work. We might note further that in this procedure the fact/value distinction is not obvious. Leavis says in effect that it is a fact that the

¹¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marcuse*, London, Fontana 1970, p. 17.

¹² Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

¹³ F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, p. 54.

novel displays the feature that he censures and to see this is to see something that counts against the work. Compare here Frank Sibley's remark about a certain kind of critical procedure:

On the other hand we often simply mention the very qualities we want people to see. We point to a painting and say "notice how nervous and delicate the drawing is" or "See what energy and vitality it has". The use of the aesthetic term itself may do the trick; we may say what the quality or character is and people who had not seen it before see it.¹⁴

Marcuse operates something like this. "The facts", he tells us, "are all there" (ODM 197). It is his intention to point them out, to remind us of these facts about our social structure, and he does not expect us to be neutral to what he points out. The facts are to be presented to us in such a way as to make them speak (ODM 142 and 158). Thus:

The desideratum is to make the existing language itself speak what it conceals or excludes, for what is to be revealed and denounced is operative within the universe of ordinary discourse and action (ODM 158).

Now if this is Marcuse's method we might immediately wonder about allegations that his methodology is unlike that of Wittgenstein. In Wittgenstein we get too the recommendation to proceed in philosophy by laying out the facts in such a way as to make them speak and remind us of what we might, through carelessness or for some deeper reasons have failed to see in them:

Philosophy simply puts everything before us and neither explains nor deduces anything (*Investigations* 126)

and:

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. One is unable to notice something — because it is always before one's eyes. . . . And this means that we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful (*Investigations* 192).

Having noticed some initial similarity between what Marcuse does and what Wittgenstein advocates we can enhance the sense of connection by looking a little more closely at what Marcuse lays before us. This falls into two parts. There is, first, a description of society as it is, which is clearly offered in a reminding way. The reminders are

¹⁴F. N. Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts" in Barrett, ed. *Collected Papers in Aesthetics*, Oxford, Blackwell 1965, p. 83.

meant to point out to us, or cause us to see, the defective social structure that surrounds us. This negative appraisal is done in terms of certain value assumptions and the second component of Marcuse's account is a description of the essence of man. It is in terms of our understanding of this essence that we evaluate actual societies.

In these procedures we can find an implicit assent to Wittgenstein's assertion that philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language.

When Marcuse describes to us in negative terms the society of which we are members he must assume in us a shared use of the descriptive evaluative terms that he uses to describe that society. He is not at liberty to *invent* meanings for the terms he uses. He is not at liberty to say for example, such things as "the *bad* thing about this society is its lack of oppression". For that would be to operate some kind of private code and as he himself says:

Language is nothing private and personal, or rather the private and personal is mediated by the available linguistic material, which is societal material (ODM 157).

For this reason Marcuse assumes, and is obliged to assume, that the language he uses is all right as it is. It does the job he wants of it when he describes his society. And if, the facts being agreed upon, his right to describe society in this way were questioned, all he could say in the last resort would be "this is how we speak" or "this is what we do" (cf. *Investigations* 217).

Let us now look at the assumptions on which Marcuse's critical descriptions of our society are founded. I have shown that the basic assumption is that a human being is in essence a being whose fulfilment lies in his happiness. The criticism of society rests on this assertion about the nature of a human being. (see, e.g. ODM 169).

There are of course problems here, and Marcuse is well aware of them. There are, for example, problems about whether happiness is to be spelled out in terms of pleasure and if so whether quantity or quality of pleasure is basic. Marcuse talks about *these* matters in an essay on Hedonism which is part of his collection *Negations*. But for my present purposes the interesting question is about the status of Marcuse's assertion about the nature of or essence of a human being, that is of the claim that "human being" means "happiness seeker".

Marcuse does not argue this conclusion, and I have said that the fact that the conclusion is not argued does not count against its

acceptability. But, in the light of what I have said earlier, if an assertion is not argued then the philosopher who offers it must offer it in the spirit in which Wittgenstein says that the philosopher must proceed. That is, it must be put before us with the aim of presenting us with something that once seen *shows* its truth. And it must be put before us in such a way as to make us see its truth. Marcuse does offer his account of the essence of man in this spirit, and so his procedure follows Wittgenstein's precept.

Now a further point: if Marcuse offers us his definition of man in the spirit of one who says "don't you see, we mean by 'human being' such and such", then what is offered is not offered as a *discovery*. Rather we are being invited to think about the concept of a human being *as we already have it* and invited to see if we don't agree that this is what we mean. We are expected to agree and if we don't the best that can be done is to offer us further reminders of what it is that we can't see, much as Polemarchus was reminded that *he did not* mean by "justice", "returning what was borrowed". We aren't then offered a discovery by Marcuse. What we are offered, in Wittgenstein's words, "comes before all discoveries" (*Investigations* 127).

Suppose next that I could not see that "human being" means what Marcuse claims that it means. Well, here Marcuse could not get anywhere by merely stipulating that "human being" means what I can't yet *see* that it means. What force would that stipulation exert upon me? But this is to say that one can't interfere with the actual use of language. For there to be a communicative language transaction between us, I have to see the point of what he says (which is to say that I must come to see that he is reporting *my* use of language as well as his.) There must be an "agreement in judgment" (*Investigations* 241–2) between us. But I cannot will this agreement, nor can it be willed upon me. If there is dispute in such cases Marcuse could have prevailed only by getting me to see that as *I* use the language, I in fact speak as he does when he uses the term "human being". He will have to assemble reminders to get me to see this (using techniques that are perhaps not unlike those that a critic might use to get me to see that a picture is a good one).

I in my turn might have tried to get him to see that in his description of the term "human being" he has misrepresented our (his and my) use of language. I have to use similar reminding techniques. I might, for example, have tried to remind him that people seek self fulfilment in ways that go against their happiness. A

great athlete may come to think that in the effort to attain perfection in his or her calling he or she sacrificed happiness, and yet he or she might feel that it did not lie in his or her nature not to pursue that end. Or I might have sought to remind him that some have seen no sense in making happiness a final human goal. Luther is reported to have protested on hearing this suggested: "leiden, leiden, kreuz, kreuz" — suffering, suffering, the cross, the cross. To those who say that Luther was merely suggesting another path to happiness I can only quote the reply of Bernard Williams:

To the limited extent that I understand Luther's outlook . . . the point is that there is no *means* open to man towards reconciliation with God, no set of human projects conceivably adequate to secure this result — the gap is too great, and there is merely one sign of hope, Jesus Christ, that God's grace will lift up the undeserving. The devout man will obey the will of God, as best he can in his forlorn condition, and must retain his consciousness of that condition, but not *in order* to secure for himself, or anyone else salvation, which is at best a wild hope; and if he is rejected he can have no complaint.¹⁵

Next, to take one last example, I might have tried to remind Marcuse that a man's belief that he had had a fulfilled life is not necessarily the belief that he had had a happy one. Wittgenstein is reported to have said shortly before dying, "Tell them I've had a wonderful life." He did not seem to have meant that he had had a happy life (although he might then have been happy about his life.) This is why Norman Malcolm writes:

When I think of his profound pessimism, the intensity of his mental and moral suffering, the relentless way in which he drove his intellect, his need for love, together with the harshness that repelled love, I am inclined to believe that his life was fiercely unhappy. Yet at the end he himself exclaimed that it had been 'wonderful'. To me this seems a mysterious and strangely moving utterance.¹⁶

In reply to these attempted rejoinders Marcuse would doubtless have offered reminders of his own. He might have tried, and the essay on Hedonism in *Negations* touches on this, to show that misunderstandings about happiness as an end are themselves conditioned by a defective social structure an understanding of which

¹⁵Bernard Williams, *Morality*, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1973, p. 91.

¹⁶Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: a Memoir*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1962, p. 100.

would make it clear to me why some deny that happiness is an end that humans by nature seek. However long the debate goes on the fact still remains that neither of us can put an end to it by fiat. I cannot interfere with language in this way. The debate will end if one or other of us comes to understand the workings of our common language and to see how in our claims we have come to misrepresent those workings. So again the situation seems to be none other than that which Wittgenstein had in mind when he said:

A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not *command a clear view* of the use of our words (*ibid*, 122). A philosophical problem has the form "I don't know my way about" (123). The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose (127).

This brings me to a point of great importance. A little while back I used the example of the critic trying to get someone to see something about a work of art. But critics can fail to win assent. In such a situation that critic may keep trying but nothing will guarantee success.

The same can happen in the kind of argument that Marcuse and I might have had. What happens then? One possibility is that more of the same might eventually work. That indeed cannot be ruled out. But we may come to feel that we just don't see things in the same way. (We are like two critics, one of whom likes Brahms but not Wagner, and the other of which likes Wagner but not Brahms, with the additional complication that they might both like Bach).

We can easily forget what a grace of fate it is that disagreements of this kind are not more common in speech situations. Consider, for example, that you and I learn the meaning of the term "vivid" with respect to colours and use it perfectly happily in this way. Then I call a *metaphor* "vivid", without feeling that I have in any way changed the meaning of the word (see, here, *Investigations* Part II, section xi, e.g. p. 216). As a matter of fact most people will follow this projection of the language. But I cannot see that anything guarantees that they will do so. Nor do I see what I can do to make them follow me if they can't see the point of what I have done. There is always this possibility of a breakdown and when it happens we will not understand why another says what he does. All we can say is, I think, what Wittgenstein says:

We also say of some people that they are transparent to us. It is, however, important as regards this observation that one human being can be an enigma to another (*ibid* p. 223).

To say that one person can be an enigma to another, in the sense I have given to this remark, is to say that I must admit the possibility of alternatives to the way I think and respond and project the words of my language. The agreement in judgment that I have with others is contingent:

We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing ensures that this projection will take place . . . just as nothing ensures that we will make and understand the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfilment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation, — all that whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls “forms of life”. Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less than this.¹⁷

The contingent basis of systems of human communication and the possibility of alternatives to those agreements gives, I hope, the lie to any claim that Wittgenstein’s philosophy “closes down” as Marcuse puts it, any notion of alternatives to the established reality.

IV

Are there any reasons apart from sheer misunderstanding why Marcuse should have reacted in so hostile a fashion to the work of Wittgenstein? I can best answer this question by mentioning what seem to me to be some of the reasons for that hostile reaction.

First, Marcuse clearly believed that when Wittgenstein says that “philosophy simply puts everything before us and neither explains nor deduces anything” (*Investigations* 126), he meant that the reality laid before us in a philosophical assertion is *neutrally* laid before us. Marcuse, that is, believes that on Wittgenstein’s account understanding what is laid before us exerts no pressure on us to modify belief or

¹⁷Stanley Cavell, “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy”, *Philosophical Review*, 1962.

behaviour. This attitude to Wittgenstein's work is shown in the following passage:

The self styled poverty of philosophy committed with all its concepts to the given state of affairs, distrusts the possibility of a new experience. Subjection to the rule of the established fact is total . . . The prohibitions are severe and authoritarian: "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language" (ODM 145).

I cannot see that there is anything other than a misunderstanding here. On Wittgenstein's view, what is put before us is not something to be passively acknowledged, but is something that is meant to have a powerful effect on the subject of the exercise (who may be the philosopher himself) much as the critic's descriptions are meant to affect evaluations of works of art. We need the philosophical presentation because we "fail to be struck by what once seen is most striking and most powerful" (*Investigations* 129).

A second reason for Marcuse's hostility is that he confuses two possible claims. One is the claim that the existing structure of society is all right as it is. The other is that "language is all right as it is". Marcuse attributes the former to Wittgenstein:

Philosophers themselves proclaim the modesty and inefficacy of philosophy. It leaves the established reality untouched; it abhors transgression (ODM 141).

I know of no evidence that Wittgenstein thought that things are all right as they are. In fact I find the contrary:

It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light into one brain or another — but of course it is not likely (*Investigations*, Preface).

What I do find is clear evidence that Wittgenstein believed that one could not interfere with *language*, which is "all right as it is." And I have argued that Marcuse's work shows a commitment to the truth of that view.

There is a third and possibly more interesting reason why Marcuse is unhappy with Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy. I referred earlier to two possible attitudes to "linguistic" philosophy. The radical rejection claims that this philosophy is methodologically misconceived. The less fundamental objection is that the kinds of problems that the "linguistic" philosophers dealt with using their methods were trivial. Concentration on sense data and the problems of other minds are out of order in desperate times:

If linguistic analysis does not contribute to such understanding; if instead it contributes to closing thought in the circle of the mutilated universe of discourse, it is at best entirely inconsequential. And at worst, it is an escape into the non-controversial, the unreal, into that which is only academically controversial (ODM 160).

Linguistic philosophers, it is claimed, should apply their talents in what Marcuse calls really controversial areas:

If such clarification goes beyond a mere enumeration — and classification of possible meanings in possible contexts, leaving the choice open to anyone according to circumstances, then it is anything but a humble task. Such clarification would involve analysing ordinary language in really controversial areas, recognising muddled thinking where it seems to be the least muddled, uncovering the falsehood in so much normal and clear usage. Then linguistic analysis would attain the level on which the specific societal processes which shape and limit the universe of discourse become visible and understandable (ODM 157).

In this passage we find a commitment to the view that the philosopher has to display clearly the forms of speech and to display clearly what is implicit in these forms. The task outlined looks very like that Wittgenstein envisaged as the philosophical task. Indeed juxtaposed the following look remarkably similar:

And yet the facts are all there which validate the critical theory of this society. . . . But the facts and the alternatives are there like fragments that do not connect (ODM, 197).

The problems are solved not by giving new information but by arranging what we have always known (*Investigations* 109) A perspicuous representation produces that understanding which consists in "seeing connexions" (*ibid* 122).

It looks then as though, in spite of all the fundamentalist thunder, the charge is not that the methods of "linguistic" philosophy are wrong, but that the deployment of these methods is pusillanimous. What is to be said about this more limited claim? I am not sure that it is entirely true, although if there is any force in Marcuse's attack it is to be found in this area. I offer three comments.

First, as more of Wittgenstein's work becomes available so it becomes obvious that he did not deal only with a certain narrower range of philosophical problems but touched on wide areas of human culture.

Second, Wittgenstein often expresses his concern with method,

with questions about what philosophers might be able to do (a concern, as we shall see that is shared by Marcuse, and with strikingly similar conclusions). There is some suggestion that the particular problems that are discussed in the *Investigations* are there not because they are somehow *more important* than any other problems that philosophers might be moved to discuss but because they are good *examples* by which to show the force of the methodological remarks. (Thus paragraph 133 tells us, "we now demonstrate a method by examples".) The important point, however, is that a method has been found, and that the methodological remarks might have a bearing on problems in wide areas of human thought. (Consider here Winch's use of them in his discussions of the nature of social science). I am not sure then that Wittgenstein would have disagreed that there were "controversial areas" which he had not discussed in the *Investigations*. But he might well have said that before doing anything in these areas it is important to sort out what *can* be done, and we shall see that Marcuse is of much this opinion. (See, for example, the essay entitled "Philosophy and Critical Realism" in *Negations*).

Third, I doubt that the claim to be inconsequential in the choice of problems to discuss can be brought by Marcuse against Ryle and Wittgenstein. I have shown that implicit and explicit in the work of these two philosophers are views which challenge any simplistic positivistic view of reality. That is also a concern Marcuse has. Hence, if the work of Ryle and Wittgenstein is "trivial" then, since their concerns overlap with those of Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man*, that work stands self-condemned.

v

There is one last complexity to be dealt with, one last source of anxiety that many have had about "linguistic" philosophy.

As I have described Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy, that approach involves an attempt to bring to the light of the understanding what we implicitly know. The philosophical task is complete when clarity has been attained, much as the critic's task is complete when he has got us to see the merit of a work. Now some have criticised such an approach for not offering an account of how, granted we are brought to see how things are, we might seek to change them for the better. (This view is proclaimed on the tomb of Marx, where we are told that philosophers have tried to understand

the world whereas the problem is to change it).

If there is a criticism of linguistic philosophy here it is not one that Marcuse can bring. For it is also his view that philosophy, by its nature can offer no praxis for radical change. All it can do is help us to comprehend the nature of reality that confronts us by making it speak itself to us. Here are two statements of this, one darker, one clearer:

To be sure, philosophy contradicts and projects thought only. It is ideology and this ideological character is the very fate of philosophy which no scientism or positivism can overcome. Still its ideological effort may be truly therapeutic — to show reality as that which really is and to show that which this reality prevents from being (ODM 160)

and less darkly:

The transformation of a given status is not, of course the business of philosophy. The philosopher can only participate in social struggles insofar as he is not a professional philosopher (*Negations* 147).

If this is true then philosophy cannot interfere with how things are, which make us wonder why Wittgenstein was so castigated for saying this. "Linguistic" philosophers cannot be criticised for a failure to tell us how to change society for the better because on Marcuse's view that is not a philosophical task.

It is ironic in this connection that not merely "linguistic" philosophers but Adorno, Marcuse's colleague in the Frankfurt School, got into trouble just because of a refusal to provide a revolutionary praxis to go with his theory:

Young radicals who had shortly before crowded the aisles to hear the erudite Adorno speak on Hegel's *Logic* or Goethe's *Iphigeneia*, disrupted his lectures. They attacked him because his revolutionary theory seemed to leave no space for revolutionary praxis. In May 1969 students occupied the Institute and when Adorno did nothing to stop the police from evicting them, their sense of betrayal was complete.¹⁸

In this paper I have wished only to show how little force there is in Marcuse's attack on what he calls "linguistic" philosophy. Latterly I have said that Marcuse is in no position to attack these philosophers for failing to give indications as to how reform or revolution might proceed. For he does not think that that is a philosophical task. The task of the philosopher is to display the reality of the social structures

¹⁸Susan Buck-Morris, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, Hassocks, Harvester 1977, p. x.

for us in such a way as to make their significance inescapable. This, however, leaves some nice questions. For example we might ask why Marcuse thought that philosophy, qua philosophy, could have nothing to say about revolutionary praxis? Second, we might ask what, if anything, could provide such a praxis?

As deeper issues begin to open up it is worth observing that on Marcuse's view there are in principle severe difficulties in supplying guidelines upon which a revolution or reform might be planned and acted upon. For such guidelines would presumably consist in empirical statements about human beings and the kinds of strategies that they might adopt to bring about different arrangements for collective human life. That looks like the task for some empirical science of society. A science that is at least in part predictive and which is guided by an understanding of the ends of human life. Unfortunately, on Marcuse's own account science of any sort, and in particular the scientific study of men and women, is nothing but an instrument of domination and control:

With respect to the institutionalised forms of life, science (pure as well as applied) would thus have a stabilizing, static, conservative function . . . The point I am trying to make is that science *by virtue of its own method* and concepts has projected and promoted a universe in which the domination of nature is linked to the domination of man (ODM 135 and 136).

So "empirical sociology" is suspect (ODM 99 and 198) and it looks on Marcuse's own account as if there cannot be a satisfactory account of the prescriptions for reform or revolution. All that one can do is remain negative in one's attitude to the established reality and hope for something better.

It is nothing but a chance. The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success it remains negative. (ODM 200)

(The tone of this is remarkably like the Preface to the *Investigations*, with its doubtful "hope" that "this book" should bring light into "one brain or other" in the "darkness of this time".)

The question whether there can be a revolutionary prescription is the question whether there can be an adequate empirical social science, by means of which explanations and predictions of human behaviour can be found and on which a programme of social reform

can be based. Nothing I have read gives me any confidence that such a social science is anywhere near construction.¹⁹ On the other hand everything that I have read convinces me that a proper understanding of at least some of the things that "linguistic" philosophers have said, e.g., about language mind and reality, is an essential pre-requisite for any discussion of the possibility of such a science of human social life.

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¹⁹But for a valiant attempt to clear the ground, see Russell Keat and John Urry, *Social Theory as a Science*, London, RKP, 1975.